

A Few Notes on Clearwings

By H. C. HUGGINS, F.R.E.S.*

I was very interested in Mr Allen's note on the colony of *Aegeria vespiformis* L. on elm at Bleackheath.

In August 1934, I was walking down Chalkwell Avenue in this town, when I saw on a young poplar with a stem about four inches in diameter, a boss the size of two closed fists. The trunk of the rest of the tree was quite smooth and the boss had evidently been caused at the beginning by some casual injury, but now it was riddled by Clearwing larvae, and several emerged pupa-cases were still visible. These seemed a bit larger than the average run so I hoped they might prove to be *Sciapteron tabaniformis* Rott. Next year in early June I revisited the tree and extracted a number of pupae, and bred several very fine *vespiformis*, two of which I still have.

I wrote about this to my friend J. C. F. Fryer (later Sir John Fryer, K.B.E., F.R.S.) and he wrote back that he had recently been breeding this moth from elm, but only found it where there were excrescences from frequent pollarding.

The tree in Chalkwell Avenue was removed two years later as it did no good, but in 1955 I found a number of *vespiformis* pupae in nodules on old poplars in St. Helen's Road, Westcliff; these nodules were caused by annual pollarding of trees at least 30 years old. All have since been removed.

In 1955 I was strolling round the Southend Nature Reserve towards the end of June in a part that had been coppiced two years before and saw a couple of pupa-cases protruding from the stool of a sweet chestnut. I set about examining these and found several more, two of which had newly emerged *vespiformis* beside them. I also got a moth from an aspen stool, which at first greatly surprised me, but on reflection I decided a poplar feeder might easily try aspen. Curiously enough I have never obtained *vespiformis* pupae from oak except from two or three year old stumps under the bark, where of course it may be found in most southern woods.

I have never seen *S. tabaniformis* Rott. and my friend Fassnidge told me he believed all genuine British specimens had been accidentally imported in foreign timber. Saleroom specimens have usually a different origin; I well remember Cockayne's mischievous grin and "Aren't you going to bid?" when several of these cropped up from time to time.

Mr Allen's mention of the pupa-cases on the elm roots reminds me that the larva of *Sesia apiformis* Clerk often goes right down into the poplar roots; I have found the emerged cases sticking out of the ground a couple of feet from the trunk. *S. apiformis* was formerly very common here; I have seen a dozen newly emerged ones in a morning about 9 a.m., but by mid-day all would have ascended the tree. As I think I have written before, the male copulates with the female on the wing, flying backwards to her as she clings to the bark. Once connected he drops to sit below her on the tree. Owing to a change

* 65, Eastwood Boulevard, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex.

of policy all the town poplars have been removed and I have not seen the moth for five years.

Another Clearwing which is now much rarer is *A. formicaeformis* Esp., owing to the osiers used in basket-making being no longer grown. This moth had several ways of feeding. In the new shoots it made a smooth symmetrical gall. When I lived at Faversham from 1924-28 there was a large osier-bed that had not been touched for ten years or more, and was gradually being destroyed for the brick-earth on which it grew. I found the larvae both in the young shoots and also in the big trunks, about as thick as a man's wrist, usually in the fork. These required a big lump of the trunk being brought home, but as the bed was being destroyed I was allowed to cut out sections with a saw. The specimens bred from the trunk were invariably smaller than those from the shoots, probably from the hard drier wood. I still have examples of both.

Formicaeformis is common in the Coomerkane Valley, near Glengarriff, Co. Cork, where it feeds in the sallows by the side of the road, seeming to prefer those cropped by goats, although these pests must eat a lot of the larvae.

Fryer used to breed *formicaeformis* by sawing off the tops of the stumps from which the osier shoots sprang, in the same way as is done for *A. culiciformis* L. on birch.

Notes and Observations

MYTHIMNA LOREYI DUP. (THE COSMOPOLITAN), COLIAS CROCEUS GEOFF. AND OTHER IMMIGRANTS IN CORNWALL IN 1975. — At the Lizard, Cornwall, in August, I took the following at light: *Mythimna loreyi* Dup. (24th, one, 28th, two), *Trichoplusia ni*. Hb. (26th, one), and *Hyles lineata* F. ssp. *livornica* Esp. (24th, one, 25th, one). By day, I noted several *Macroglossum stellatarum* L., many *Cynthia cardui* L. and about 40 *Colias croceus* Geoff., including one female of the pale form. — BERNARD F. SKINNER, 85, Elder Road, West Norwood, London, S.E.27.

AN EXCESS OF ORGYIA ANTIQUA LINN. (THE VAPOURER). — Acting upon a rumour I visited Coventry City centre on Sunday 27th July where I was presented with an incredible sight. The moth was in all stages of development, batches of eggs, larvae in all sizes, cocoons and imagos. Every new leafless branch of the street trees was enveloped with a haze of cocoons, some forks having up to twenty spun one on the other. The never ending army of larvae had progressed to pavements below regardless of pedestrian traffic. The nearby telephone exchange building was smothered with eggs from wingless females which themselves hung in scores from windows and ledges. Larvae reached unnerving heights in their fruitless quest for food. Never have I seen such enormous numbers of any species in so small an area. It seemed strange that up to this date I had not even a bred series in any of my cabinets. — DAVID BROWN, Charlecote, Warwick.